"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin

Published by The Christian Rural Fellowship, Room 1111, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Number 100 February, 1945

The Rural Church and International Cooperation

HOLBROOK LIBRARY PACIFIC SCHOOL OF RELIGION

By Rockwell C. Smith*

What I have to say this afternoon will soon reveal to you that while my honor may possibly be safe from the charge of having picked pockets I am indefensible against the charge of having picked minds. My only extenuating circumstance is that I have picked great minds, minds great both in the dimension of intelligence and in the equally important dimensions of integrity and love of God and men. I shall not name my benefactors for the list is long, and the many who are here would be embarrassed. Nor do I seek to put upon them any of the obvious shortcomings of what I have to say. The truths we proclaim are borrowed; only our errors are original.

On the morning of January 9, 1920, two items were read into the Congressional Record--items which provide a significant introduction to a consideration of the role of rural churches in the work of international cooperation. The one was a series of resolutions sent to Congress by the Georgia Division of the Farmers' Educational and Cooperative Union of America; the other was President Wilson's letter to the Jackson Day Dinner of his party. The letter follows the resolutions immediately in the Record. The content of the two communications and their juxtaposition epitomized the forces then at work in rural America and were prophetic of the tragic circumstances--national and international--in which we now find ourselves.

From the resolutions, we quote the following: "Resolved that the Georgia Division of the Farmers' Educational and Cooperative Union of America, in convention assembled in Atlanta, Ga., this 26th day of November, 1919, does hereby request the President of the U. S. and the U. S. Senate to exempt all farmers and agricultural workers from the international labor office controls; ....."

President Wilson, among other things, had this to say: "Germany is beaten but we are still at war with her, and the old stage is being reset for a repetition of the old plot. It is now ready for a resumption of the old offensive and defensive alliances which made settled peace impossible."

Well--the farmers effectively secured the exemptions they sought. And in our lifetime President Wilson's melancholy prophecy has become fact. So much is clear to even the most casual student of recent events. But ought not the vital connection between action and prophecy symbolized by the juxtaposition of the two

---

*Dr. Rockwell C. Smith is Assistant Professor of Rural Church Administration and Sociology at Garrett Biblical Institute, Evanston, Illinois. This paper was presented at the National Convocation on the Church in Town and Country, Columbus, Ohio, September 6-8, 1943. Grateful acknowledgment is made to Dr. Smith and the Committee on Town and Country.

items in the Record to be equally clear? Georgia farmers who successfully sought exemption from world standards and world responsibilities were Christian men, yet they had not mastered the fundamental Christian insight that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28.) The subChristian attitude which their action indicated made not only possible but necessary those governmental and private acts of the 1920's and early 30's which we now see as the precursors of the Hitlerian world. It gave the sinister power of prophecy to the words of President Wilson. International interdependence which is not lifted to the plane of international cooperation will soon fall to an order of slaver and enslaved.

Further evidence in support of this point of view comes to us when we compare the presidential election returns for 1916 and 1920. President Wilson triumphed over Hughes in 1916 because of the 33 states in the Union then more than half rural, 25 gave him 221 electoral votes. Eight rural states gave Hughes 65 votes. Of the fifteen urban states, five gave Wilson 56 votes and ten gave Hughes 189 votes. It was the vote of the rural states in 1916 which elected President Wilson for his second term. In 1920 all of these rural states save those of the solid south had gone over to Harding and the return to "normalcy." All of us are aware that election returns are the product of many variables and that no simple single cause produces them. Nevertheless the observation seems justified that Wilsonian idealism secured its major support among rural people in 1916 and also suffered its most complete repudiation among them in 1920.

Whatever interpretation we may place upon such facts, it is time that we as rural churchmen came to solid grips with them. Do they not mean at least that the coming peace may well be won or lost not at Washington or London but in grassroots communities back home? I take it that we all agree that a peace which does not involve a system of international world cooperation will be lost in the long and, indeed, even in a short run. Interdependence around the world is today a matter not of choice but of necessity. Shangri-la is now not an isolated Eden but an airplane carrier. What we can choose is to develop our interdependence into conciously planned cooperation. If we do not do this, our interdependence will involve us in a long and smouldering contravention which cannot but lead eventually to armed conflict. War is not declared any more because incipient conflict is our constant state. What must be declared is peace. The right choice can only be made through effort to the point of sacrifice by all men particularly rural people; the wrong choice is a simple matter of slipping back into the provincialism and smugness we have worn so long.

If rural communities are significant arenas in which the fight for international world cooperation is taking place, are rural pastors aware of the struggle and active in it? A limited answer can be given in terms of the speaker's experience. With the problem in mind I have consulted 39 rural pastors since June 15. These men are serving in seven different denominations and eleven different states. Probably they are better educated than rural pastors as a whole across the nation. Seventy-four per cent of them (29) report that they are preaching on problems of the postwar world. Sixty-nine per cent (27) report that their churches are giving the problems attention in formal and informal discussion groups. Several pastors report that they are making the problems a subject of conversation in their rounds of pastoral visitation. They indicate that such a policy permits them to leave with families pertinent pamphlet literature which can later become the basis of around-the-kitchen-table family and neighborhood discussion.

An additional note of encouragement as to conditions over the nation as a whole comes to us from the National Opinion Research Center of the University

of Denver. In a release dated July 24 and appearing in the "Chicago Sun" of July 25 the reaction of a national sample of persons to the following question is given: "Do you think that the churches should make plans for the kind of peace which should be established after the war, or don't you think this is a part of their work?"

63% felt that the churches should make plans;
33% felt that it is not their work;
Only 4% were undecided.

For us, however, the pertinent item is the further statement that town and country people more than city dwellers believe that peace action is the proper work of the church. A fair conclusion would be that at least two thirds of rural people feel that the peace must be planned and that the church must have a hand in planning it.

Pastors are preaching about postwar adjustment, people in church organizations are discussing the issues, a large majority of rural people want a peace in which the church has a voice. All this is to the good--but all this is also under the exhilaration of war psychosis. And all of this is--alas--on the level of talk. One of my students in the excitement and intoxication of an examination, eager to say that the church is the focus of Christian living in the community, wrote: "The Church is the vocal point of Christian living in the community." Is it possible that our excellent vocalization is a substitute for such action within and without the community as will pave the way to world organization? Are we showing people realistically what it will cost to have "one world"?

After all what will determine the extent of world organization in our time is not what we are willing to talk about but what we are willing to do and to do without. Our Federal Council Commission on the Basis of a Just and Durable Peace has given us Six Pillars of Peace, pillars which it regards as essential to world organization. With the abstract statements, our Christian people are in agreement. But are they--indeed, are we--ready for the personal costs we must pay before these Pillars can be raised in support of peace. Consider by way of example the second Pillar: "The peace must make provision for bringing within the scope of international agreement those economic and financial acts of governments which have widespread international repercussions." Few acts of governments have wider international repercussions than the various controls exercised over agriculture in what is taken to be the farmer's or the nation's interest or both. Such acts then must be brought under the scope of international agreement, yet within four months we have seen responsible farm organizations lobbying for governmental action within the nation which could in no sense be regarded as for the welfare of even the entire nation. The attempt of elements within organized agriculture to destroy the Farm Security Administration at a time when increased food production is of paramount importance and the attempt of these same elements in organized agriculture to force prices beyond agriculture's own recognized standard of parity regardless of the effect upon the national economy are indications that the second Pillar of Peace, calling as it does for renunciations on a world scale, is vocal rather than focal in rural life. Agriculture as an international activity requires in its governmental regulation a most careful integration in world terms. Dr. and Mrs. Henry C. Taylor's recent volume, World Trade in Agricultural Products, gives the historical and statistical background of this international interdependence of agricultural production. We have said enough in connection with this one Pillar to indicate that the practical working out of the intention of the statement involves the rural community in actions which move against strongly entrenched interests there.

World cooperation so far as the United States is concerned may well depend upon the attitudes and votes of rural persons; at present rural people are theoretically favorable to world cooperation, but the practical development of such cooperation involves measures and programs and consequent sacrifices which are contrary to the policies of existing farmer organizations. Further, the practical development of a program of world cooperation must involve at least a temporary decline of what we fondly refer to as the American standard of living. The temporary privations which we are suffering under the system of rationing cannot be ended with the cessation of hostilities if we desire to make it "one world." They must be continued in the interest of sharing the world's wealth with those whose economic and physical condition is starvation. If the church is to convert the rural community at this point, it must realistically face the fact that it is working against many forces in organized agriculture and the obvious self-interest of its people.

How shall the rural church proceed?

First, for rural people we must seek a Biblical undergirding and motivation for the work of world organization. I mean this in two senses. One is in the obvious tactical sense. Many of our people have a Bible religion--the Book is for them the authority. A program of action which can be presented to them as Biblical carries with it a religious authority and prestige which other programs or the same program presented as good economics or sociology or theology do not have. It is only the part of wisdom to speak to people the language which is definitive for them. But this is only a question of tactic and the deeper reason for a Biblical approach must not be missed. It is quite probable that we shall find in the long run that a program of world cooperation will prove to be bad economically or socially or even ecclesiastically for us. We have already indicated how costly in terms of standards of living such a program will be; if we have defended it to our people in economic or social or ecclesiastical terms, they may turn our best arguments against us. As Father Serson reported this morning: "The only reason for being good is the love of God." The Bible has nothing to do with secular arguments. Its language is different; it insists that we ought to obey God rather than men. In the Bible we learn that life is an adventure built on faith, an adventure in which calculated efforts to save life end in the losing of it while self-abnegating enthusiasm for the Christian fellowship even to the extent of loss of life leaves us infinitely the more alive in the end. This is Revelation in the sense of data given to us directly, data leading to conclusions and action based on conclusions at which we could not have arrived by any amount of a priori reasoning. It is the ultimate authority on which we can draw for a motivation adequate to bring us into world fellowship. "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, repent, and believe the Gospel."

Second, let the church realize that world cooperation is its business. You and I favor cooperation not because it is efficient or necessary but because it is Christian. We are to love one another; the badge of our profession in the early church was that we did love one another; indeed our love is not to be limited by the narrow bonds of desert according to our Savior but is to move out to our enemies, specifically to those whose treatment of us is insulting and hurtful. The unique task of the Christian church in the rural community is to universalize the personalities of those who make it up. Indeed to become saved or to enter the Kingdom of God means, socially speaking, that we recognize ourselves as citizens not only of our particular local community and nation but of a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God. Whatever the theological flavor or favor that, in social terms, is what every rural church is seeking to do. To the degree that it succeeds, it is the Church; to the degree it fails, it

of the commitment of our wills to the will of God. We are to become stewards asking not what we ought to give to others but what we may with honor use for ourselves. What we formerly have looked upon as charity will now be seen as having the first claim upon our resources, the basic claim of need. Shall we retain the larger portion of our income for our own use? Only if our need is in that proportion greater than the need of others. Resources both of person and property must be viewed in the light of total need and apportioned in terms of that need.

This involves the rural church, at once, in a greatly extended support of the missionary program of the church. At first this support will be mainly in the form of money but it cannot remain permanently on the cash level alone. Many of us are looking forward in postwar years to the development of a concern on the part of the church which will challenge it to say to each of its young people: "If you will give a year or two years of your life for unpaid Christian service, we will provide funds and equipment whereby you will be enabled to serve for us and as our representative in areas of the world where the need of reconstruction is greatest." I envision the finest youth of our nation and of other nations giving two years of service at the hardest of tasks at home and abroad. I see them taking the home fellowship out to others around the world and bringing back the riches of the world fellowship to the local church. I see them giving their lives in an unpaid service and finding their lives in new richness and personal power.

The stewardship which would enable the church thus to challenge and implement its youth for service would also supply the resources both of attitude and of wealth which would give rural youth its opportunity on the land, its opportunity for professional preparation, its place in the professional or craft life of the small community. Our speakers on farm tenure pointed out to us the desperate need of a stewardship ethic applied to land in the rural community. Again and again they declared that the best means we now have for solving the problems of faulty tenure systems are impotent until they are given life by a philosophy of life, a sense of goals desired, a profound personal motivation. We must live and preach stewardship.

We have been reminded that our present pseudo-prosperity has not solved a single one of our basic problems domestically speaking. Unemployment, farm problems, labor problems, race problems, youth problems, family problems are either receiving a temporary solution in terms of our war emergency or are being glossed over or forgotten in the face of what seems to be more important business. But the day of reckoning will come, the day on which we dare postpone no longer the real solution of our difficulties. Other agencies than the church must contribute of course to the solution of these grievous dislocations of our national life. The Church has as its part in the solution, it seems to me, the challenge of preaching and practicing stewardship.

These are things which each rural church can do:

1. Base our pleas for world cooperation on Biblical rather than sociological or economic foundations as the only ones adequate to support a world life.

2. Feel and teach that cooperation of all kinds is our business as religious persons.

3. Show our people that the imperfect churches we now have are already cooperators around the world.

4. Preach and practice stewardship as the practical commitment of all life and wealth to God.

If we do not follow these and such other courses as will point us to "one world" then we have chosen another world as really as if we had purchased it from a store show case or the Sears Roebuck catalogue.

Several years ago a youth, son of a wealthy industrialist, came to his pastor to say that he had felt the challenge of the missionary work of the Church. Together they talked of the world-wide Christian enterprise and the young man felt called to service in Japan. The next day the boy's father telephoned the pastor demanding an interview. At the interview he spared no pains in making clear that such a plan had no standing with him, that he had plans of his own for his son, that the boy was destined for a position of responsibility in his business, and that, to use his own words, "I haven't any son to waste upon those damn Japs." Today he is giving four sons to fight them. The refusal to show a Christian concern ultimately involves us in a costly military concern. There is no option which permits us to be unconcerned about any other human being. Christians in rural communities are faced with momentous decisions in the months ahead--and they will live a long time with the decisions they make.

PRINTED IN U. S. A.